

Theatre Aurora hopeful new lease can be hammered out

By Brock Weir

Theatre Aurora is hopeful a new lease on their Henderson Drive building can be hammered out with the support of Council.

The local theatre company raised concerns with Council members last week over signing a new contract for their facility that expired nearly two years ago. Following 'roadblocks' and new clauses in proposed leases they objected to, Theatre Aurora took their concerns to Council in an email intended to answer questions posed to staff at last week's Council meeting by Councillors John Abel and Wendy Gaertner that staff were unable to answer.

'In 2014, as the first 10 years of our lease was to come to a close, members of the Theatre Aurora Board of Directors approached the Town of Aurora to exercise the option to extend the lease for an additional 10 years as outlined in the lease,' wrote Board member Joey Ferguson. 'The Town of Aurora verbally approved the extension and rent was paid, although staff on behalf of the Town expressed a desire to update some of the wording in the lease.'

'Since we were under the impression that there would be no major changes to the lease, we agreed, awaiting to hear back from the Town as to a written version of an updated lease.'

Fast-forward a year, and Theatre Aurora was still awaiting their updates, contended Mr. Ferguson. That year, however, a meeting with staff did come up where proposed changes were outlined, some of which they questioned. One suggested change was the Town would have access to use the facility at a reduced rate of 'hard costs,' which they agreed to, but earlier this year a further draft came forward 'with major changes we were not expecting.'

'Under the new lease, the Town of Aurora, through the Director of Parks and Recreation, would have exclusive access to Theatre Aurora whenever it did not conflict with a Theatre Aurora scheduled performance,' says Mr. Ferguson. 'Theatre Aurora would incur all costs for any use of the building by the Town of Aurora, with elements including sound, lighting, staff, etc., highlighted directly. This is contradictory to what was agreed upon verbally [by staff] in 2015]. In addition, we were concerned about the exclusive use, which would add to the costs incurred by Theatre Aurora, as we are responsible for all utilities and upkeep of the building, as well as greatly restrict our ability to use the facility.'

Questions were also raised in the new draft lease over responsibilities for covering outstanding maintenance work set to be carried out on the building by the Town through funding secured by Theatre Aurora through the Ontario Trillium Fund.

Since reaching out to Council, Mr. Ferguson says he has started to see a 'positive response' from a number of Councillors who are looking to get things back on track.